Jeremy’s Quiggle

By David Roosma

For Robert

Chapter One

It was a hot summer day. Jeremy sat with his toes dangling in the cool water of the brook, which chattered like kindergarten children, noisy and happy. His terrier Alina, who stood with her feet in the water as well, looked at him quizzingly, but Jeremy was not in the mood for swimming.

The brook ran not far from where Jeremy lived with his Dad – some of the time. The rest he spent with his Mom, who lived only five minutes away. Jeremy’s parents had separated, although they still ‘got along’ – sort of – and more than anything else, he wanted them back together again.

The sunlight danced merrily on the water’s surface. How could he make the family one once more? One of the spots of sunlight turned to deep indigo-purple, and then back to gold. Jeremy stared. What did Grandpa say they were? Fo- something. Photo - Photons! That was it. Waves and particles together. Jeremy’s Grandpa was an astrophysicist, which meant he studied how stars work – and other things.

The speck of light grew blue, then red – like the star Grandpa showed him once – and seemed to grow bigger. Jeremy could have sworn it was smiling at him! And then – it was on his hand. A gleaming phosphorescence in a sort of globe, except that the edges were constantly changing shape; the whole changing colour continually. And there was definitely a simple face in it, such as Jeremy himself might have drawn.

“Hello!” said the object. And somehow Jeremy was not afraid. “ Who – what are you?” he asked. “Hmm, well, that’s not easy to explain,” said the glowing face. “You may call me a Quiggle”.

Chapter Two

Alina, to Jeremy’s astonishment, took absolutely no notice of the Quiggle. “Where do you come from?” asked Jeremy. “Come from?!” said the Quiggle,

turning turquoise. “I don’t ‘come from’ anywhere, you know; just am.” “Why are you always changing colour?” “Ah! These are YOUR colours, Jeremy – your feelings. How you interpret me.” “You know my name?” “Name? Yes, names I know – all of them.” Saying this it turned a soft velvety black, which was some how very comforting.

Jeremy observed it in wonder. He could not believe he was talking to a speck of light as if it was the most natural thing in the world. “Why are you here?” he said finally.

“Well, you know,” said the Quiggle, turning cherry red, “…to teach.” “Teach what?”

“Seeing.”

“I can do that!”

“Ah yes, but not inside.”

“I don’t understand.”

“That’s why I’m …here.” said the Quiggle, becoming yellow and green.

“Inside … like atoms and those stringy things?” asked Jeremy, thinking of what Grandpa had told him. The Quiggle’s eyes seemed to twinkle. “Inside: that’s where we all touch. Where…division is not. Some call it the fire of consciousness.”

“The WHAT?”

“The stringy things!” said the Quiggle laughing, and turning sky blue and white. “Here comes your Dad.”

Jeremy turned to where the Quiggle was looking, but there was no sign of anyone. Even Alina did not look up from following a butterfly over the brook. “What do you mean?” said Jeremy, turning back to the Quiggle – but it was gone.

“Hi, there!” said Dad right behind him. “Dad! How did you get here?!”

“Just walked from the house” laughed his father. “Ready to swim?”

“The most amazing thing just happened!” countered Jeremy. “I was talking with a Quiggle, and now he’s gone!”

“A Quiggle?” said Dad, raising a bushy eyebrow.

“Yes, sort of a coloured blob – I can’t describe it.” Jeremy observed his Dad with a crestfallen look. “You probably don’t believe me.”

“Who said I didn’t? I have never met a …Quiggle, but that doesn’t mean you couldn’t. …Ah, what did he say?”

“He said that everything is the same… inside.”

“Did he now!” said Dad, picking up Alina, who was begging to be hugged. “And what else?”

“He said he came to teach me to See.”

Dad put down Alina and stared at him. “Really? A very high goal. Chang Zhu claimed it was the meaning of life.”

“Then you believe me!” smiled Jeremy, relieved.

“Naturally. This is not something you could have made up.”

“What should I do if it comes back?”

“I think,” said his father, “that we should tell your Grandpa.”

Chapter Three

Jeremy’s Grandpa lived a good distance from town. By the time they arrived, it was twilight. Grandpa was setting up his big silver telescope on the terrace. June, his big lop-eared Labrador, bounded joyfully over to meet them, but Alina was not amused. She was always a bit scared of the big dog. “Aw, Alina, it’s okay; you know her!” said Jeremy, pulling treats out of his pocket for both dogs. Alina calmed down and June took off with her to show her around the yard.

“Hi, guys!” said Grandpa. “You timed your visit well; there’s going to be a meteor shower tonight.” He hugged his son, and shook hands gravely with Jeremy.

“Hi, Grandpa! Have you ever seen a Quiggle?”

“A Quiggle? Quarks I know, and Quantum particles: but Quiggles are a new one on me!” said Grandpa, pouring out apple juice for the three of them.

“One spoke with me today.”

“One spoke with you?”

“Yes, it just appeared; a sort of blob always changing colour, and told me that inside, where the strings are, everything is the same, or nothing moves – something like that. And then it was gone.”

“Charles, what have you been telling him?” laughed Grandpa, easing into the old wing chair on the terrace.

“It wasn’t me, honestly! It all comes from Jeremy. Dad – he said this thing told him it had come to teach him to See.”

Grandpa looked at Jeremy very carefully. “I’d say,” he said slowly and with a warm smile, “I’d say you’ve been blessed with a marvellously creative imagination… wish I had that!”

“You don’t believe me!” cried Jeremy. He felt hurt and angry. “Dad did!” And he ran into the yard.

The dogs were chasing each other around under some ancient Rhododendrons. Jeremy sat down under a pine tree. A golden sliver of moon was rising and peered through the branches. “How can I make them believe me!” he grumbled.

The moonlight became stronger. It glistened on the sap pearling on the pine’s trunk, reminding Jeremy of the light dappling the surface of the brook – but no Quiggle appeared. “Maybe I just sort of day-dreamed it all?” wondered Jeremy to himself. For some reason, he turned the palm of his hand up to look at it in the moonlight… and there was the Quiggle. Not on his hand, but somehow inside it. And Jeremy knew, somehow, that he wasn’t seeing it with his eyes – but rather with his mind. He hardly dared to breath.

“What are you doing in there?” he whispered.

“Oh, just… hanging around.” said the Quiggle, now exactly the colour of Jeremy’s hand.

“They didn’t believe me, you know.”

“Are you sure?”

“I think so.”

“Well, no matter!” said the Quiggle, turning turquoise.

“…How is it you are inside me?” asked Jeremy.

“In-side….?” queried the Quiggle, turning purple. “Ah… I see what you mean… ‘Space is God’s imagination’ it said dreamily, becoming quite silver. “Said once a friend of mine.”

“You have friends?!”

“Of course… like you”.

“I don’t have very many” said Jeremy wistfully.

“Enough.” observed the Quiggle.

“Is your friend like you?”

“Mmm…?”

“I mean, is he another Quiggle?”

“What? Ah, no, or … rather yes; hard to say. He’s a Greek.”

“A Greek? What’s his name?”

“Par-me-ni-des” pronounced the Quiggle, slowly and carefully.

“Parmenides” repeated Jeremy.

There was a long silence. The cicadas zirped cheerfully. The crescent moon stood now over the pine. “Jeremy, supper’s ready!” echoed across the garden. “Got to go now!” Jeremy was about to say – but the Quiggle seemed to be somewhere deep inside him … so it didn’t seem to make any sense.

Chapter Four

Jeremy’s Dad had been talking with his father. “I would guess that Jeremy is working out his own way to reconcile himself to you and Maude’s being separated, don’t you think?”

“It could be. But when he mentioned Seeing – that really got me. I feel I was never very good at listening, you know.”

“I’d say you’re not so bad, son – but you and Maude never really fit together. That’s been clear almost from the beginning.” He started to make hamburgers; with blue cheese inside, a family speciality.

“I suppose you’re right. But I dearly love her. …Still dream about her.” He felt a hand on his shoulder.

“And I still dream of your mother, although she passed on more than ten years ago. Nothing goes, you know…” Jeremy’s Dad basked in his father’s warm smile. “I know!” he grinned. “Two places at once – ‘Unless you look at it!’” they said together.

“These should be ready in five minutes, Charles – why don’t you call Jeremy?”

Jeremy bounded to the terrace, the dogs in yapping pursuit. “Hamburgers!!” he cried, jumping over the three steps in one leap.

“Hope you’ve got an appetite!” observed Grandpa. “These turned out kind of big.”

“Yeah!!!”

Jeremy took his place in the middle, with one joyfully expectant dog on each side. “Hmmm. Nobody makes hamburgers like you, Grandpa!” exclaimed Jeremy with his mouth full. Grandpa got the gist of the pronouncement and smiled.

“Well, how’s your Quiggle doing?” asked Dad cheerily. Jeremy looked at him gratefully. “Funny you should ask, Dad. He was just telling me something really weird he got from a friend. Par-me-ni-des.” said Jeremy carefully. “Parme- !!” His father and Grandpa exchanged astonished glances.

“-mides.” finished Jeremy proudly. “A Greek. Said something like “Space…

space is God’s imagination. That’s it. What’s it mean?”

Grandpa and his father were speechless. Then his Dad said:“Where… but this is impossible!” he stammered.

“I don’t believe Paremides wrote anything like that…” said Grandpa thoughtfully. “Indeed not!” said Dad. “I’ve read every surviving fragment – he was my favorite Ionian at school – and he never mentions God’s… imagination.” The hamburger was a bit too big after all, and Jeremy was surreptitiously giving pieces of it to the two dogs, who devoured them forthwith.

“It would be consistent with his system, though.” observed Grandpa .

“But where on earth does Jeremy get such ideas?”

“I told you, from the Quiggle” said Jeremy.”If you’re not sure, why don’t you write this guy and ask him?”

Both men laughed. “Jeremy,” said Dad, “Parmenides lived 25 centuries ago.”

Jeremy’s eyes caught a streak of light that filled the whole left quarter of the sky. “The asteroid showers!” he exclaimed, running into the garden. Dad and Grandpa followed.

Chapter Five

Riding back in the car that night, Jeremy said he must have seen a hundred meteors; everywhere light and motion, in every direction…

“Magnificent!” agreed Dad. “I never saw so many at once…”

“And the Milky Way shining behind it all.”

There was a long, happy silence.

“Dad… Are you and Mom ever getting back together?”

Another silence. “Well,” said his Dad at last, “I think your mother and I can be better parents for you… when we’re not living together. I love her dearly, but we don’t seem to … fit.”

Another silence. “I know you’d rather have it otherwise. …Why don’t you ask your Quiggle about it?”

“I’ll do that.” Said Jeremy, very quietly.

The moon shone through the window on the coverlet and dappled the floor. Dad had told him the usual invented-on-the-spot story from six objects

that Jeremy had named for him, and now he lay in the darkness, waiting for sleep. It didn't come. Alina was already snoring.

He turned over and thought about his mother. And the Quiggle… where was it hiding? He looked at his hands, but saw only hands.

Observing the moonlight shining on the coverlet, he noticed how the edges of it's fold seemed to dissolve into the air. He closed his eyes – and saw a golden-orange circle, which had a black hole in the middle. Although there was no face, he knew it to be the Quiggle – for, in his mind, a voice seemed to come from the center…

"You want to know why… your Mom and Dad are not together." He heard in a voice like the sea. "Seeing inside – the three of you – will reveal it to you, in order that you may accept…" spoke the Quiggle.

"Remember that I'm to teach you to See?" The circle turned a wonderful soft cornflower blue, with a golden circle in the middle.

"But how do I see inside?"

"It takes practice. It helps to be around people who are good at it. Like Shakespeare, for instance, or Mozart… and of course, Rembrandt. And…"

"Wait a minute, aren't all those people dead? Which reminds me: How can you be friends with this Parmi- guy when he lived over two and a half thousand…" Jeremy stopped. Somehow, gazing at the Quiggle, he already knew the answer. "I understand." he said. "For you, time doesn't exist."

"…Time doesn't exist." echoed the Quiggle. "Knowing the works of these men, you know them. Didn't your Dad read 'Julius Caesar' to you?"

"Indeed. Some of it was exciting, some boring. What does that have to do with seeing inside?"

"Shakespeare lets you experience the innermost thoughts and life of the people on his stage" said the Quiggle. "That's what's missing in everyday life; but it's essential to it. Mozart does the same thing with music, and Rembrandt – well, when you look into the eyes of one of the people he's painted, you nearly become that person."

"Really? Sounds cool. I never saw any Rembrandt."

"You can also do it with the people across from you!" laughed the Quiggle, becoming cloud-white. "In fact, you must – if you wish to understand…"

"Understand" said Jeremy sleepily…

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“Jeremy!Wake up! …Time to get up!” called his mother.

“Mom! I just had the most wonderful dream!”

“Really? What was it about?”

“About Dad. And… a “Quiggle”.

“What’s a Quiggle?”

FIN

(The End)

Notes

According to Quantum Theory, the Universe is made up of “grains of space”, which occupy a position only when observed; that is, interact with something else.

Parmenides was a philosopher-scientist who lived in Elea, a Greek colony in the south of the Italian peninsula, from 515 to 445 B.C. He was the first to hypothesize that the earth was a sphere and explain the reason for the phases of the moon, among other things. His radically new experience of existence eventually led to the development of atomic theory.